

GROTESQUE ALPHABET OF 1464

REPRODUCED IN FACSIMILE FROM THE ORIGINAL
WOODCUTS IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
CAMPBELL DODGSON, M.A.

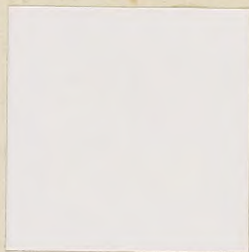
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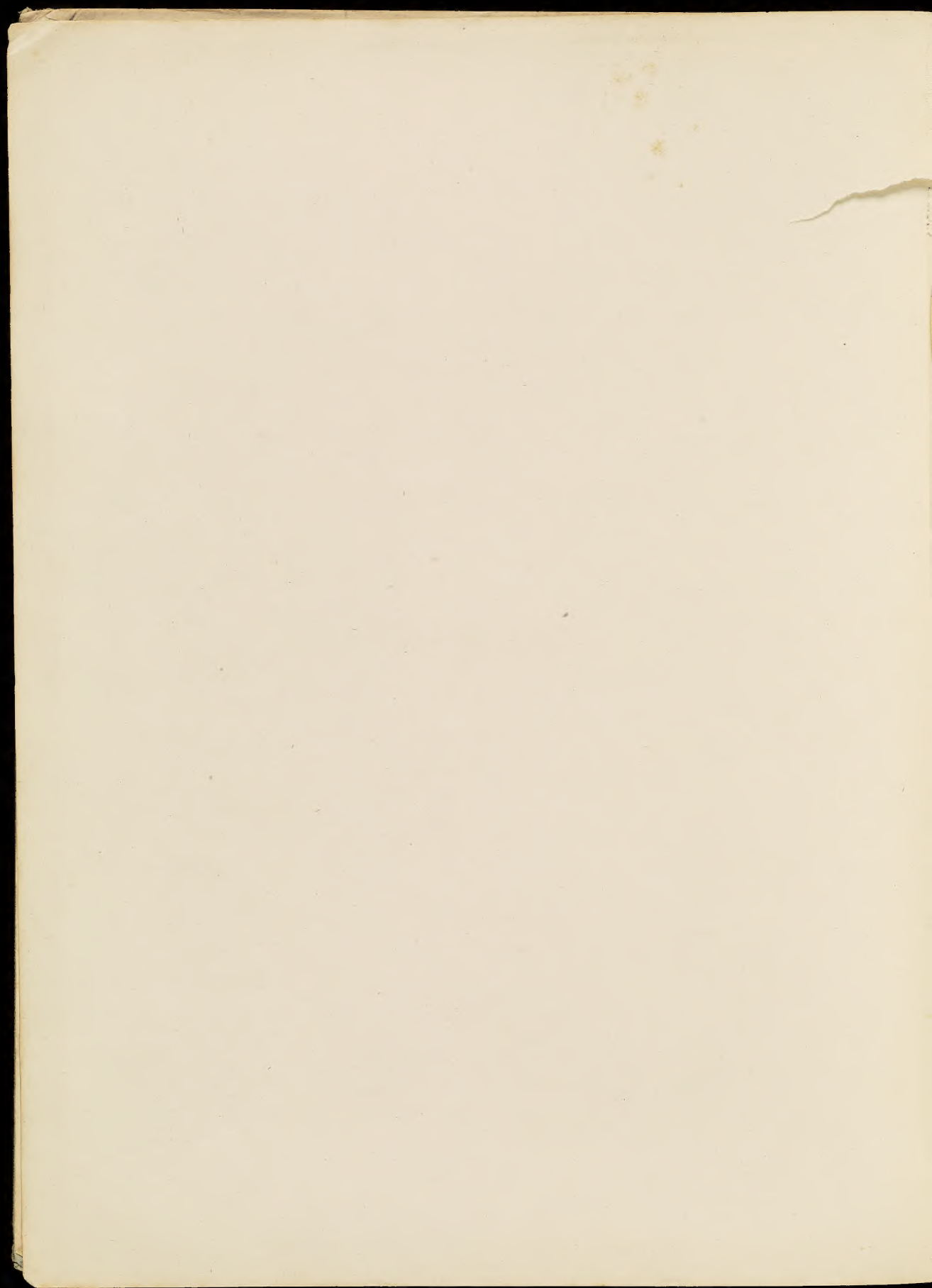
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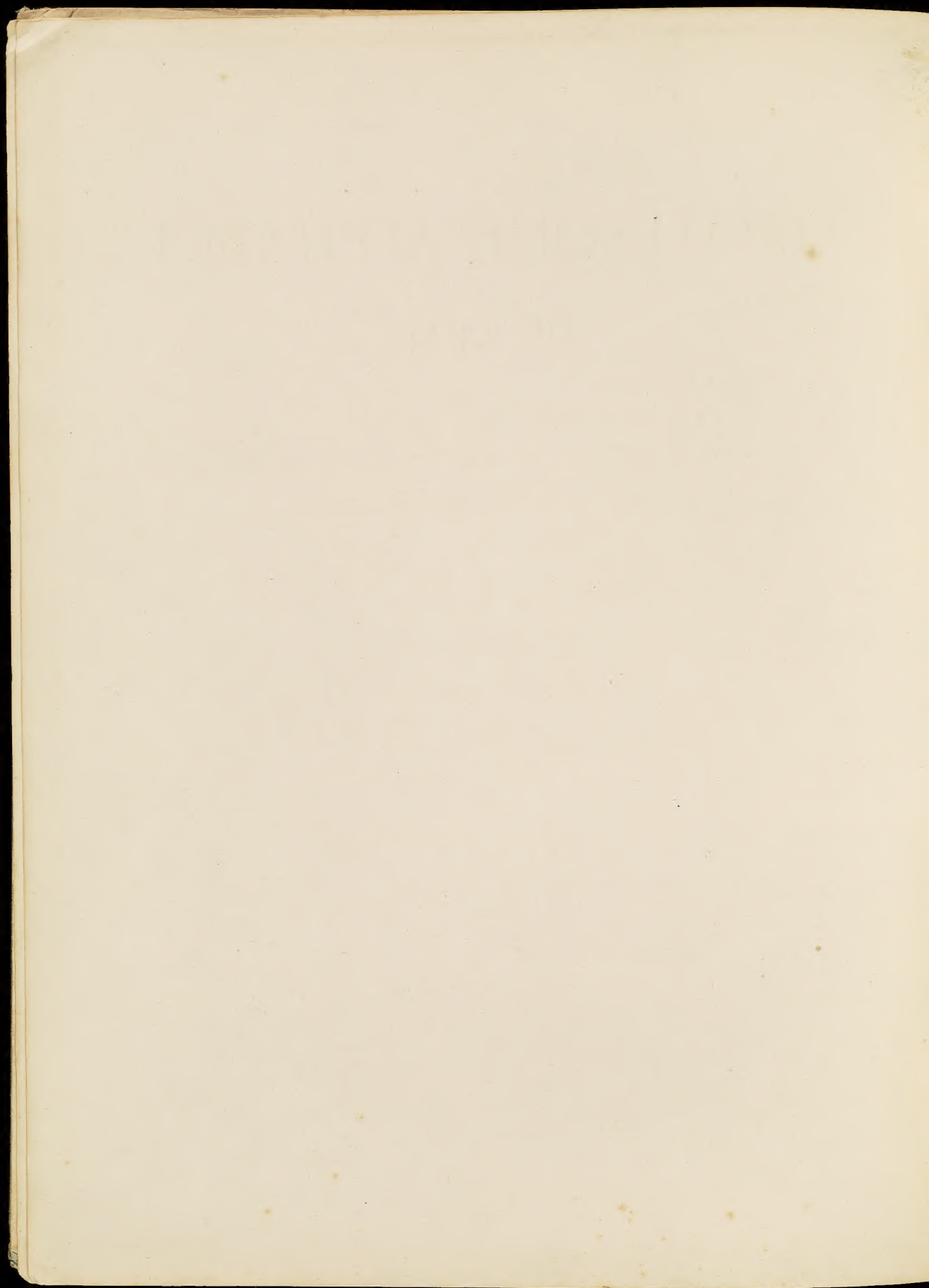
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GROTESQUE ALPHABET

OF 1464.

THE Grotesque Alphabet which is here reproduced for the first time in facsimile has enjoyed for eighty years a high reputation as one of the most artistic and remarkable productions of the art of wood-engraving in the fifteenth century. It is rare indeed at that period to find so spirited a design, or a craftsman so capable of preserving its vigour and elasticity in the process of cutting it on the block.

The alphabet was presented to the Trustees of the British Museum by Sir George Beaumont, Bart. (1753—1827), who already possessed it in 1819. It is not known from whom he acquired it. The parchment wrapper in which the letters were formerly bound, each being guarded on the inner margin by a strip either of paper or parchment about two inches wide, appears to have been made up in England early in the sixteenth century, and an early possessor of the volume, one Edward Lowes, wrote his name in the cover.

The complete alphabet should consist, as is proved by the copies to be described below, of twenty-three letters (omitting J, U, and W), followed by a design of ornamental foliage. In the present set, the only one known to exist, the letter S (not T, as has hitherto been invariably stated) is wanting entirely, whilst of A, T, and V only fragments remain. The outlines of A have been pricked through for the purpose of transferring the design. The border of several letters is imperfect, but H is the only other case in which any portion of the character itself is lost. The impressions were taken by means of the rubber in a watery brown ink which has failed in several cases to express fully the lower lines of the border. Some portions of the letters A, B, H, N, and Q have been touched with vermilion, but the woodcuts have escaped any other colouring. There are scribblings by an old hand on several of the letters in ink which is now almost exactly of the same colour as that of the impression itself. On the sword in the letter L the word "London" is distinctly written, and on the clothes of the reclining man in the same letter is a name which has generally been read as "Bethemsted" (the letters which follow "h" seem rather to be "ni"). On B is written "R beths" (?), perhaps an abbreviation of the same name. There are scribblings in the same old ink on the letters C (between the legs of the young man on the left, after a similar detail in the letter B) and M (on the hat of the man who forms the

upright in the centre and at the top of his feather). A later owner, perhaps in the seventeenth century, has repeated each character in his own florid hand-writing in black ink on the letters K, R, X, Y, Z. Lastly, on the back of the concluding ornament is the draft of a letter (now no longer visible, since the leaf was backed before it was mounted) in a hand said to be of the time of Henry VIII., which has been read as follows: "Right Reverent wershipfull masters and Frynds, In the moste loweliste maner that I canne or maye I here recōmende me duly glade to her of yor good prosperite and welth."

Each letter is surrounded by a frame of which the outer portion is supposed to be flat and seen only from the front, while the inner portion recedes and is drawn in perspective from the right, being shaded in every case at the top and on the left side. The groups of figures which form the letters are supposed to stand out in relief within the recess of the frame, but they occasionally come so far forward as to pass the inner limits of the frame and appear against its outer surface. Occasionally, as in F and I, the figures appear to be actually standing on the lower cross-bar of the frame: they are more often raised above it, standing apparently on nothing. The background in every case is left white, and there is nothing to indicate that the back of the frame is filled in. A similar frame, drawn in perspective from the left, surrounds the illustrations of the *editio princeps* of the *Ars Moriendi*, but in that work the figures always remain set back behind the frame. The ornament at the end of the alphabet has a double border, not drawn in perspective but regarded as flat.

The average dimensions of the letters are 117×91 millimetres. The dimensions of the several letters (omitting the fragments) are as follows:—

B. 118×90 mm.	G. 115×90 mm.	M. 117×90 mm.	R. 115×91 mm.
C. 117×90 "	H. 115×90 "	N. 119×93 "	X. 119×91 "
D. 117×93 "	I. 116×90 "	O. 119×90 "	Y. 117×90 "
E. 116×91 "	K. 117×90 "	P. 120×90 "	Z. 117×90 "
F. 115×91 "	L. 117×91 "	Q. 119×93 "	Ornmt. 116×91 mm.

Before the sheets were cut up there appears to have been an interval of 20 mm. between each row of letters. This interval was divided, half-way across, by a single horizontal line, and it was along this line, sometimes including it on one side or the other, sometimes cutting exactly through it, that the letters were cut off. Those letters, consequently, which are bounded either at the top or the bottom by this line, accordingly as they originally stood above or below it, have a margin in that direction of 9–11 mm., whilst in the other direction, towards the outside of the sheet, the margin amounts to as much as 20 mm. No letter has a margin of more than 6 mm. (usually 3–4 mm.) at the side, so it is possible that the letters were placed close to one another within the row. However, as those letters which seem to have stood at the ends of each sheet have no more margin than the rest, it may be that they were cut closer at the sides than at the top and bottom, and that the interval was originally larger.

The reconstruction of the three original sheets by Sotheby (*Principia Typographica* I. 122) in the diagram here reproduced is, no doubt, correct.

A	B	C	D
E	F	G	H
I	J	K	L
M	N	O	P
Q	R	S	T
U	V	W	X
Y	Z	Foliage.	

It is based upon the position of the watermark, an inverted anchor with a cross over it, which occurs three times on the paper of the alphabet. The upper portion appears in the letters (A, now lost,) E, and I; the lower portion in the letters N, R, and X. Each pair of letters thus indicated would have formed the left-hand portion of one of the three sheets. When these three were joined together, end to end, the whole alphabet would have run consecutively in two rows, from A to M and from N to Z. There are two pieces of strong confirmatory evidence for this reconstruction which were overlooked by Sotheby and, in part, by Willshire in his *Descriptive Catalogue of Early Prints in the British Museum*.

1. The first part of the alphabet, A—M, which should form the upper portion of the three sheets in Sotheby's scheme, has in fact its wide margin at the top and is bounded at the bottom by the line of partition, while the letters N—Z and the ornament, forming the lower portion of the three sheets, have their wide margin towards the bottom and are bounded at the top by the line of partition. It will always be found that where a letter which Sotheby places in the top row carries this line of partition with it, the letter which should come underneath has in fact a narrower margin, cut short of this line. This can be seen most clearly in the last sheet; the letters I, K, L have more than their fair share of margin, including the whole of the line, and the letters X, Y, Z less in proportion, whereas in the case of M, while the greater part of the line goes with that letter, a thin strip of it may be seen above the ornament.

2. The same arrangement exactly is followed by the "Master of the Banderoles" in his engraved copies (see the facsimile published by the International Chalcographical Society in 1890), which, as we shall presently see good reasons for believing, were based upon this alphabet and not on the other version preserved at Basle. The objection made by Dr. Max Lehrs to Sotheby's reconstruction (*Der Meister mit den Bandrollen*, 1886, p. 8) falls to the ground, for it is based upon the mistaken assumption of the identity of the British Museum alphabet with that at Basle.

I have found in the Bagford collection of fragments relating to the history of printing, acquired by the British Museum in 1753 with the Harleian MSS.,¹ evidence that the alphabet was known at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and that either this actual set, or another set of impressions which has since disappeared, existed at that time in a complete state. The folio volume known as Harl. 5934 contains a set of very rough copies of the alphabet, the work of an inexperienced English woodcutter. The average dimensions of the letters are 115 × 85 mm. They are printed four on a sheet, the letters A—H being cut two on a block, I—V four on a block, while X—Y again form a pair, and Z stands by itself. The ornament is not reproduced, and instead of leaving a space for it, the printer has put Z in the middle under X Y. In Harl. 5934 the letters A—D are wanting, while Z appears in duplicate, but Harl. 5966² contains the complete alphabet on six sheets (Nos. 101—106 in the volume) reduced to quarto size by cutting down the margins. In a MS. list of contents in Bagford's hand at the beginning of this volume the alphabet is described as "Antique A B: of Ye first specement [specimen] of printing," but there is no note as to the whereabouts of the originals. Harl. 5934 contains, further, a set of bad pen-and-ink drawings from the original woodcuts, of the same dimensions as the woodcut copies and evidently the immediate patterns from which these were taken. In the drawings the letters E—H are wanting. The other letters are placed invariably four together on a sheet with the borders touching (which shows that the original intention was to cut four on the same block throughout) except that on the last sheet the letter Z is placed in the middle under X Y, no notice being taken of the ornament. The draughtsman, followed by the woodcutter, has made no attempt to reproduce the perspective frame, but has merely surrounded each letter with a border of two lines 4 mm. apart. The woodcut copies are printed on a paper of which the watermark is a shield bearing a post-horn surmounted by a crown, with the letters W R (*Wilhelmus Rex?*) below the shield. John Bagford, a shoemaker, with literary tastes and a rage for collecting, who died in 1716 at the age of 66, issued in 1707 proposals for a history of printing, which never came to anything. It is probable that these woodcut copies of the "antique AB"

¹ The majority of Bagford's volumes are now in the Department of Printed Books.

² The alphabet in this volume was mentioned by Willshire (*Catalogue*, vol. ii. p. 210) who, however, made no other use of it than to describe the subjects of those letters which are missing in the original alphabet. Even then he did not discover that the fragment existing in the original belongs to T, not S. He had not seen the further materials in Harl. 5934. In his *Addenda* (p. 489) he stated the correct opinion that the Bagford copies were made direct from the woodcuts, not from the engraved alphabet, a reproduction of which had then recently been published (1881) by Dr. G. Dehio.

were destined, together with the numerous copies on wood of leaves of block-books and of old watermarks which are to be found in the same volume, to serve as illustrations to the projected *magnum opus*. Bagford probably considered the concluding ornament an unnecessary addition to the alphabet and omitted it intentionally. The wood-block from which two of the letters of his copy were printed is in the Print Room (in the inventory of 1837, origin not stated, probably part of the Bagford collection).

The chief, indeed the sole, interest of these late copies, lies in the evidence which they give as to the existence about 1700 of the letters which are now lost. Especially important is the indirect evidence that the letter A was dated 1464. The date must have been indistinct, or else the draughtsman was too uneducated to understand it, for he read the first part of the date (mcccc) as the word "mine," and gave up the second part (lxiii) as a puzzle, writing it "liiii." The woodcutter thought he could make a better job of it and produced, probably without having the original before him, an inscription which reads "thine miu." He probably intended to make it "thine mine," which sounds neat and epigrammatic, but had scruples before he got to the end, and let his second word run off into mere strokes (see reproductions, pl. vii.). It is rather surprising, after this, that the rebus on the letter K, "mon ♥ aues," has been copied correctly. This piece of involuntary evidence as to the original reading disposes of Schreiber's gratuitous assumption that the A in this alphabet was "probablement sans la date." He wrote these words without any evidence before him in one direction or the other. There is no doubt that the copyist had our alphabet (or a duplicate of it) before him, and not the Basle alphabet. The reasons for this belief will be more appropriately given below, in discussing the relations between these two versions. He certainly had not the engraved copies before him (though there may have been a set of these in England at the time—the set afterwards in Francis Douce's collection; see Willshire p. 206, letter by S. Lysons; this set, however, was imperfect¹), for wherever the engraved copy differs from the original, especially in the shading and folds of the drapery, the English woodcuts will be found to agree with the original.

There is no need at this date to describe over again the subjects of the letters, especially as this volume contains reproductions of the whole alphabet in the British Museum, and of the letters in the similar alphabet in the Basle Museum which preserve the composition in those cases where our own alphabet is defective. Willshire's description², which is detailed and, on the whole, very accurate, may be corrected in a few particulars.

F. It is not true that the trumpeter "kneels on the back of a young man." The straight fall of the drapery from his shoulders to below his knees shows that he is standing. The fact is that the one pair of legs which primarily belongs to the trumpeter is made by a clever trick to do duty equally for the young man who bends forward at right angles to form the lower arm of the F.

¹ I have not been able to ascertain whether it is now, with the rest of the Douce collection, the property of the University of Oxford.

² Descriptive Catalogue of Early Prints in the British Museum, Vol. I. (1879) p. 200.

I. Willshire has given the man two right hands. It is the woman's left hand that is placed under the man's chin.

P. What Willshire takes for a "large conical cap" is a buckler ("targe," Schreiber). Willshire, followed by Schreiber, says that a fragment of S is present, but that T is wholly wanting. In fact, the fragment is the left side of T, as will instantly appear on comparing the fragment with the Basle letter (pl. ix).

It remains now to compare this alphabet with the other xylographic alphabet at Basle, and with the engraved alphabet by the "Master of the Banderoles," in the light of the new material which has been published since Willshire's Catalogue appeared (1879—83). This new material is contained in the following publications:

1. Max Lehrs, *Der Meister mit den Bandrollen*, Dresden, 1886, pp. 6—10, with a very complete summary of the previously existing literature on the subject, and facsimiles, pl. 7—12, of three of the Basle woodcuts, A K P, and three of the engravings.

2. The Chalcographical Society's publication for 1890, with a facsimile (No. 12) of a complete set in the Pinacoteca at Bologna of the alphabet engraved by the "Master of the Banderoles."

3. W. L. Schreiber, *Manuel de l'Amateur*, Tome II, Berlin, 1892, pp. 324—327, description of the two woodcut alphabets in the British Museum and the Basle Museum as distinct, Nos. 1998—9.

4. L. Kaemmerer, *Ein spätgotisches Figurenalphabet im Berliner Kupferstich-Kabinet*, *Jahrbuch der K. Preuss. Kunstsammlungen*, xviii. Heft 4, Berlin, 1897. (Primarily an account of an alphabet of about 1400 drawn in pen-and-ink on vellum, but the article contains also a review of other grotesque alphabets, both earlier and later.)

5. The Chalcographical Society's publication for 1897. *Gothic Alphabets*, with text by Jaro Springer, pp. 3—4, and a complete facsimile, pl. xiii.—xvi., of the Basle alphabet, in which the two sheets of the original are divided into four.

I will take first the question of priority between the designer of the woodcuts and the engraver of the alphabet on copper. When Willshire wrote, this question might still be treated as an open one, though such authorities as Douce, Renouvier, Nagler, and Galichon had borne witness to the artistic superiority, at least, of the woodcuts to the engravings, while Passavant¹ and Dehio² were the only critics who had committed themselves to the opinion that the woodcuts were copied from the engravings. Willshire himself (Catalogue II. 143, 489) rightly treated the engravings as copies, though he regarded the date 1464 as an addition made by the engraver. But Dr. Max Lehrs (op. cit.) has done away with the claims of the "Master of the Banderoles" to be an original artist at all, proving him to be a mere compiler, when he is not a direct copyist, of other men's work. This very alphabet, which obtained for him the name, current for many years, of "The Master of 1464" is a case of direct copying, and is artistically very inferior to the prototype on wood. The date 1464 belongs to the woodcuts, not to the engravings which merely repeated it from them. All critics have

¹ *Peintre-Graveur* II., pp. 9, 30.

² *Kupferstiche des Meisters von 1464*. München, 1881, p. 4.

abandoned the opinion that 1464 was the year in which the engraver produced the alphabet, and the name originally proposed by Duchesne in 1834, "Le Maître aux banderoles," has now been adopted again for want of a better.

Now I may pass to the comparison of the two alphabets on wood, with regard to which the true facts are not even yet generally recognised. The alphabet in the British Museum, though known, as we have seen, to English connoisseurs since 1819, was not described in a published work till 1839, when John Jackson published his *Treatise on Wood-Engraving*, where the alphabet is described on pp. 131-139 (Ottley's *Inquiry concerning the Invention of Printing*, where the alphabet is described on p. 199, was written before 1836, but not published till 1863). All the commendations justly given by the early critics—Douce, Ottley, Chatto—to these woodcuts, as well as the allusions by Falkenstein and Léon de Laborde in 1840 (quoted by Lehrs, p. 8), refer to the English set, the only one then known.

In 1848 Professor Hassler of Ulm discovered another and more complete woodcut alphabet among the Italian prints in the Public Museum at Basle. This was assumed without investigation to be a second and more perfect example of the alphabet already known, and from that date till 1892 the same error was repeated by one writer after another—Passavant¹, Willshire², Dutuit³, Lehrs⁴. All the critics wrote as if only one version of this alphabet on wood existed, the English writers, as a rule, ignoring the Basle alphabet,⁵ while the Continental writers, finding the latter more accessible as well as more complete, no longer took the trouble to examine the London alphabet at first hand. Renouvier alone, who had seen both, suspected that they were different, but distrusted his own opinion, owing to the lapse of time between his study of the two alphabets, and was inclined to make light of the difference, if it existed⁶. He possessed the measurements of the Basle copy, but had only measured the English letters after the reproductions in Jackson's *Treatise*. His preference for the Basle copy would hardly have been maintained, if he had had the opportunity afforded by modern photographic facsimiles of comparing it directly with the other version. Holtrop⁷ repeats the remarks of Renouvier without speaking from personal knowledge. The prevailing error is especially unfortunate in such a valuable piece of criticism as the comparison of the xylographic with the engraved alphabet by Dr. Lehrs. The latter wrote throughout (in 1886) from knowledge of the Basle alphabet only, and chose three letters from that

¹ *Deutsches Kunstblatt*, 1850, p. 172. *Peintre-Graveur*, 1860, I. 118.

² *Descriptive Catalogue*, 1879, I. 209.

³ *Manuel*, 1884, I. 266.

⁴ *Op. cit.* p. 8.

⁵ e.g., Sotheby, *Princ. Typ.* 1858, I. 122-4, Linton, *Masters of Wood-Engraving*, 1889, p. 61; but also Nagler, *Monogrammisten*, 1860, II. p. 658.

⁶ "J'ai signalé quelques différences entre les deux exemplaires; la dimension n'est pas non plus parfaitement égale; enfin l'exécution m'a paru encore plus fine et plus distinguée dans l'exemplaire de Bâle que dans celui de Londres. Mais à la distance l'un de l'autre où je les ai vus, je ne puis cependant affirmer que ces différences constituent deux éditions séparées. Quoi qu'il en soit, le style et la composition sont les mêmes; ils sortent du même atelier; ils forment l'un des plus beaux titres de la gravure xylographique et de l'ancienne école flamande." *Histoire de l'origine et du progrès de la gravure*; Bruxelles, 1860, p. 107.

⁷ *Monuments Typographiques des Pays-Bas au quinzième siècle*, 1868, p. 12.

alphabet to confute the believers in the originality of the "Master of the Banderoles." What he said on this point is, of course, quite true, but it would have been even more true had he said it of the London alphabet. In giving, for the first time, a few facsimiles of the Basle woodcuts, he was unwittingly providing the means of disproving their identity with their London rivals—an identity which he himself at that time took for granted.

At last, in 1892, Herr W. L. Schreiber published the express statement that the Basle alphabet is a copy of the original in London. He did not attempt to prove this statement—without the opportunity of a direct comparison it was difficult, as he said, to do so—for he only described those letters of the Basle set which are missing or defective in the London set, and the difference of dimensions which he quotes,¹ though decisive against the identity of the two, does not in itself decide which is the original, any more than the different arrangement of the letters on the sheet, an arrangement which Schreiber perhaps would not admit to be different, since he says (wrongly, as we have seen) that the London alphabet "autrefois était imprimé probablement sur deux feuilles."

The assertion of Schreiber, proved or not proved, should, at least, have put a Berlin critic on his guard against committing the traditional blunder of regarding the two alphabets as identical. I regret to find that this old mistake has obtained a fresh currency by the sanction of the two most recent writers on the subject. Dr. L. Kaemmerer, writing in the Berlin Jahrbuch, October, 1897, describes the alphabet by the "Master of the Banderoles," as "eine genaue Kopie der künstlerisch weitaus höher stehenden niederländischen Holzschnittfolge . . . die in zwei Exemplaren in Basel und London bekannt ist." Professor Jaro Springer in the text of the Chalcographical Society's publication for 1897 (which appeared in 1898) introduces his description of the xylographic alphabet with the words: "Another example of Gothic figure and animal alphabets is engraved on wood. Two copies are in public collections, one in the Basle Museum on two uncut sheets, another, cut and incomplete, in the British Museum." This latter publication contains an excellent facsimile of the Basle alphabet, from which nine letters have here been reproduced (see pl. vii.-ix.) for the purpose of comparison with the London alphabet. The woodcuts at Basle have been partially coloured with tints of yellow, red, light brown and occasionally blue, and this circumstance accounts for certain blotches which are noticeable in the reproduction. The alphabet, which is in other respects well-preserved, is arranged on two sheets, which have remained intact, in the following order:—

A	B	C		D	E	F
G	H	I		K	L	M
N	O	P		Q	R	S
T	V	X		Y	Z	ORNAMENT

¹ The average measurements of the Basle letters are 98 × 84 mm., those of the London letters 117 × 91 mm.

A careful comparison of our facsimiles with those of the engraved and of the second xylographic alphabet, published by the Chalcographical Society (both represented here by a small selection only) will prove, I hope, more effectually than any words of mine, the two following propositions:—

1. As regards the two woodcut alphabets, the London set is the original, the Basle set a copy.

2. The alphabet engraved by the "Master of the Banderoles" and the late woodcut copy in the Bagford collection are both based upon the London, not upon the Basle alphabet.

I will now compare the several alphabets, letter by letter, pointing out the most obvious points of resemblance or difference between them. For the sake of brevity I will call the London alphabet α , the Basle alphabet β , the engraved alphabet γ , and the Bagford copies δ (treating the drawings and the woodcuts directly based on them as one).

A (Pl. I., VII.) This is a fragment in α . The flower has a long narrow calyx, not a short, thick one, as in β . The long form is copied by γ and δ . The case hanging at the girdle of the man to left has four studs down the front in α , only three in β . In γ there appear to be four, but they are not distinct. δ omits them. The left end of the rod touches the outer margin in α but not in β . With regard to the lost inscription, the evidence of δ makes it probable that α originally had two lines of writing below the men's hands, followed by the date mccccxiiij. These two lines are represented in β by two straight lines, in γ by two lines of illegible scribbling, in δ by two straight lines. β and γ also preserve traces of writing between the hands, while δ does not attempt to reproduce these, but makes the hands touch.

B (Pl. I.) In α the figures have more space than in β . The upper figure to the right, especially, appears in β cramped under the frame, whereas in α he comes forward and has free play outside it. In α both the lower figures are clear of the lower margin, which they touch in β . β omits several important folds of the drapery, especially in the lower figure on the left. In this respect δ follows α .

C (Pl. I.) The horns of the lower grotesque head in α touch the right inner margin, but not the lower margin of the frame. In β this is reversed. The expression of the man's face and of the upper grotesque head is very superior in α .

D (Pl. I.) The superiority of the two men's heads in α is very marked. The ornaments on the horse's harness are more carefully drawn in α , and the hatching on the drapery is more intelligent. The dress of the man to the right has a double hem in α (followed by γ and δ), a single one in β . The hoof of the horse and the monster's tail are quite clear of the lower line in α , while they cross it in β .

- E (Pl. II., IX.) The faces of the two men are again superior in α , and the action of the hand in grasping the horn is better drawn. The lower of the two men in α is looking away to the left in the direction in which his head is turned (so also in γ and δ); β makes him squint round to the right. Notice the sleeve of this man in α and β .
- F (Pl. II., IX.) The face of the man who blows the trumpet is better drawn in α . β omits his ear, γ gives the ear, badly drawn, while δ here follows α closely. The stooping man has smooth hair on the top of his head in α , followed by γ and δ , whereas β gives him upstanding curls. The action of the hands of this figure is better expressed in α , and the drawing of the hind-leg of the dog between his feet is better in α . So is the drapery throughout.
- G (Pl. II.) The most marked difference here is in the drawing of the eyes. Notice also the right hand of the stooping man, and the little finger of his left hand.
- H (Pl. II.) On the high head-dress of the man, what is clearly seen in α , and even in the copies γ and δ , to be a detached riband wound twice about the peak, becomes in β so indistinct as to appear part of the peak itself. The drawing of the left sleeve and arm is not so good as in α .
- I (Pl. III., VIII.) This is one of the most marked cases of inferiority in β . The expression of the two persons and all the details of their costume have lost point in the copy.
- K (Pl. III., VIII.) In the pair of lovers who form the upright, notice how in α (followed by γ and δ) the eyes meet. β turns the young man's eyes too much to the left, not upwards; he could not see the lady's eyes in this position. The scroll in α has a double border; this is followed by δ (γ here is indistinct). Notice too the shape of the heart. In α between the two halves of the heart there is a little excrescence at the top; this pattern is followed by both γ and δ ; β makes the heart quite simple.
- L (Pl. III.) The faces again are better drawn in α . All the copies omit the two studs on the hilt and two on the blade of the sword in α .
- M (Pl. III.) Notice the pointed expression of the man on the right in α , the firmness of drawing in his whole figure, the clasp of his hand in that of the next figure, and the strength of this middle head also. β is weaker throughout.
- N (Pl. IV.) The right leg of the man on the left in β is hardly recognisable as a leg at all. The left leg is also too thin, and the feet are small. In some respects β is good here. The expression of the animal and that of the man on the right, though different from α , are also good.

- O (Pl. IV.) α is more vigorous; the ears are much better drawn. Notice that the letter touches the frame at the top in β , whereas in α there is a wide interval.
- P (Pl. IV.) The figures appear a little crowded in the space allotted to them in β . The difference is chiefly in the curved figure on the right, whose face is altered for the worse.
- Q (Pl. IV.) The energy of the grotesque heads in α is softened down in β , and many of the finer details in the drawing of the faces are omitted; as in O the space left at the top in α is crowded out in β .
- R (Pl. V., IX.) The upper figure on the right appears cramped in β , and the direction of his eyes is changed. The face of the man on the left is much altered. In α this man has seven buttons down the front of his coat; β gives him only two (γ has six, while δ omits them all). The lion's claws are better drawn in α .
- S (Pl. IX.) Wanting entirely in α . The evidence of γ and δ does not suggest any marked difference from β .
- T (Pl. V., IX.) In α only a strip 15 mm. wide down the left side remains. The drapery projects much further over the shaded side of the frame than it does in β . The faces in β are of the characteristic type of that series.
- V (Pl. V., IX.) A mere fragment in α . The peaked cap touches the angle of the frame, but does not project beyond it, as in β .
- X (Pl. VI.) There is the usual contrast of vigour with vacancy in the faces. Some of the hands are bad in α , especially the raised hand of the lower figure on the left, but none of them are so bad as the left hand of the upper figure on the right in β , which has only three fingers, and is too wide and flat towards the wrist.
- Y The fine drawing of the wing in α has suffered in its translation into β . The legs are better modelled in α . β this time has introduced an additional button on the coat of the figure to the right. γ has also four buttons, but places them differently; δ omits them.
- Z The face and hands of the prostrate figure are bad in β . The grand head of the old man in α has become mean and feeble in β , and the drapery is much less intelligently drawn.
- ORNAMENT. There are many alterations in detail, and in every case, as it seems to me, β suffers by the comparison. The organic growth of the design is not so well understood, and the elasticity of the leaves has been lost. For comparison it is best to select the flowers and fruit. In the strawberry, high on the left-side, the copyist, who has drawn a network of lines all over it, has not succeeded in making it look like a real fruit so well as the original engraver, who contented himself with a skilful suggestion of the pips by a few curves. In the flower

lower down on the left, one of the surrounding leaves has dropped from its place in β , as if almost broken off. α draws it correctly, and γ follows α both here and in the drawing of the strawberry. Then the flower at the top in the centre has three sharp spikes running down from it in α , of which two only appear, less clearly drawn, in β , while the third is confused with a leaf. γ here follows α , though it is less distinct. In the lower flower in the centre β hesitates between single and double lines, and again reproduces α with less skill than does the "Master of the Banderoles."



We have seen, then, that where β shows distinct departures in form from α , γ and δ almost invariably agree with α , so much so as to leave no doubt that α was the pattern which they followed. It is not so clear that this was the case with a miniature-painter who copied the upright of the letter K, in reverse, as I, in a MS. of the *Schachzabelbuch* of Konrad von Ammenhausen in the Royal Library at Stuttgart (fol. poet. et philol. 2). See reproduction¹. The scroll which the young man holds up (having on it the date "āno dnj mccccxviij") has not the double border which we find in α , γ and δ , but the single border which appears in β only. The miniature-painter, however, has a type of feature peculiarly his own, and has not followed either of the xylographic alphabets so closely that we can say with certainty which he had before him. It would not be safe to conclude that the Basle copy was in existence in 1467. The four letters copied from the xylographic alphabet which are preserved in the Ashmolean MS. No. 1504 at Oxford, of about 1500 (all four, A—D, reproduced by Dr. Kaemmerer, *Jahrbuch* xviii. 220, also B and D, in colours, by Henry Shaw, *Illuminated Ornaments*, 1833, pl. 37), are not sufficiently exact to show from which version they were derived. The scroll on A does not appear to contain the date or any other trace of writing.

The axiom quoted by Dr. Lehrs² with regard to β and γ , that "every copy is distinguished from the original in the first place by its inferiority," applies also, though with less force, to the case of α and β . To summarise the differences between α and β , it appears to me that in α the groups have evidently been designed to fit the spaces which they occupy, whereas in β they are often cramped. This would be a natural consequence of the reduction in size. In expression α is invariably superior. β has quite a different type of face, rounder and weaker, in which the eyes are the most peculiar feature. β is weaker in the drawing of ankles and wrists. β 's drapery is never so good as α 's, for β is apt to insert meaningless hatchings and to omit lines which really tell. The hatchings are short and thin, and do not follow the actual folds

¹ Reprinted by permission of the Editor of the Berlin *Jahrbuch* from Dr. Kaemmerer's article, already mentioned, Bd. xviii. 221. My thanks are due to both these gentlemen for granting the use of this interesting illustration.

² Op. cit. p. 9.

so closely as in *a*. It is impossible to regard the two, with Renouvier, as proceeding from the same workshop.

With regard to the place of origin of the woodcuts, the most various opinions have been expressed. They have been assigned to England (!), Holland, Flanders, Germany, Burgundy, and France. These views have been supported by arguments derived:—

(1) From the letters which appear in the alphabet. Some writers have argued for a French origin from the absence of W, others against a French origin from the presence of K.

(2) From the language which occurs in the rebus on K. This, it is true, is French, but the use of a French motto would be just as likely in Burgundy, Flanders, England (were an English origin conceivable on other grounds), or even in Italy, as in France itself.

(3) From the "French" qualities of the design. No two critics take quite the same view of what *is* "French" about it. What seems grace and elegance to one appears affectation and sentimentality to another. The kneeling lover, to Chatto, is "no Dutchman," while the lady is pronounced by Sotheby to be "a buxom *Vrouw*." Dr. Lehrs¹ calls the woodcuts "French in the modern sense of the word," with reference to their qualities, while he declines to commit himself to the opinion that they were produced in any part of France, taking the geographical expression strictly. All these opinions of the German and English critics are too subjective to be convincing. The alphabet has not been claimed, as so many of the dotted prints have been, by the French themselves.

(4) From the resemblance of the alphabet to other known works. Schreiber attributes it boldly to the author of Nos. 869 and 1448 of his catalogue, the "Man of Sorrows," with the text of an indulgence in English, and "St. George slaying the dragon," both in the British Museum. He considers that these three works were all produced in the Netherlands, perhaps by a Dutchman whose acquaintance Caxton made during his residence at the Burgundian Court (!), and were destined for the English market. What are the grounds for this hypothesis? All these works are now, and have long been, in England. The "Man of Sorrows" has English text. St. George is the patron-saint of England. That is really all, and it proves nothing. All these works are printed in distemper of approximately the same colour, but so are many other woodcuts, including nearly all the block-books. As for resemblances of style, the "Man of Sorrows" has no shading at all, and the drawing is very stiff and wooden, while the "St. George" is shaded in a very elaborate and peculiar manner, with careful modelling in short strokes and dashes like those of an engraver with the burin, utterly unlike the method of shading in the alphabet, in which short parallel strokes are arranged along a line (in *β* the strokes often remain when the line which accounted for them is gone).

¹ Op. cit. p. 9, note 5.

A more serious attribution is that which ascribes the alphabet to the artist of the first edition of the *Biblia Pauperum*. This was first proposed by Léon de Laborde,¹ and has been recently endorsed by Messrs. Lehrs, Lützow, Schreiber, Kaemmerer, and Springer (sometimes with modifications, "at the time" or "under the influence" of the artist of the *Biblia Pauperum*). None of these recent writers make it clear whether they are speaking of the design or of the technical peculiarities of the woodcuts. If they mean the latter, the fact that all of them, except Schreiber, as we have seen, are speaking of the Basle alphabet only, takes from the weight of their authority, since they have not reckoned with the technical differences between the two woodcut alphabets themselves; and they are not really in agreement with L. de Laborde, for if it be granted that the Basle alphabet is by the woodcutter of the *Biblia Pauperum* it will follow *ipso facto* that the London alphabet is not. The only ground upon which the resemblance can be based is that of the original design, and it is to this that L. de Laborde appears to limit his attribution, in speaking of "Un alphabet grotesque, évidemment composé et dessiné sur bois par l'auteur de la première édition de la Bible des Pauvres."

While admitting that there is a closer resemblance to the *Biblia Pauperum* than to any other of the block-books, I cannot myself see that the resemblance is of such a kind as to warrant the attribution of both to the same author. The alphabet is the finer and more vigorous work of the two; it is only surpassed among the block-books by the finest of them all, the *editio princeps* of the *Ars Moriendi*, in which the types of countenance, still more expressive and excellently drawn, are very different from these. The alphabet undoubtedly stands nearer to the Flemish block-books than to any other group of woodcuts. I would ascribe it, therefore, simply to a Flemish artist, not otherwise known, who produced it, as there is every reason to believe, in the year 1464.

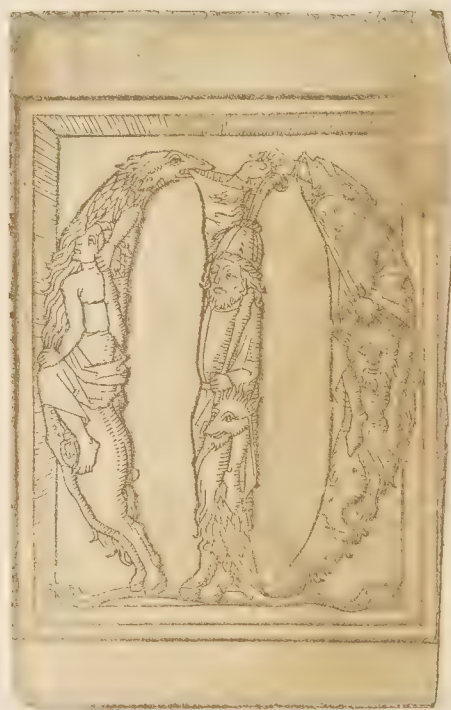
¹ *Débuts de l'Imprimerie à Mayence et à Bamberg*, Paris, 1840, p. 19, note 94.





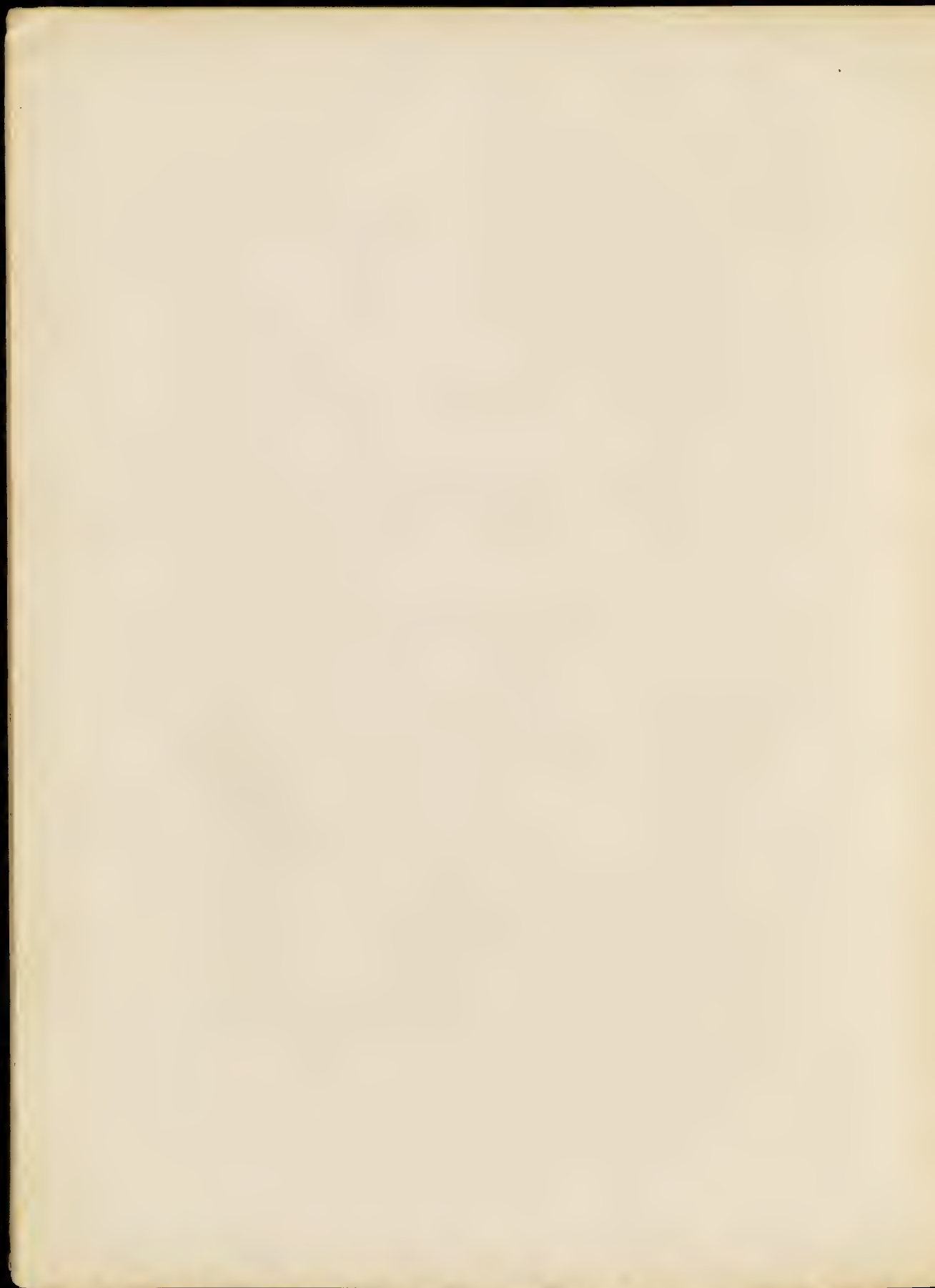


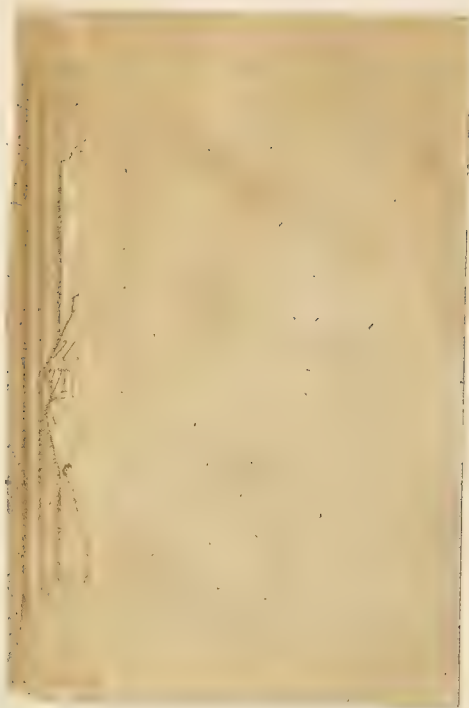


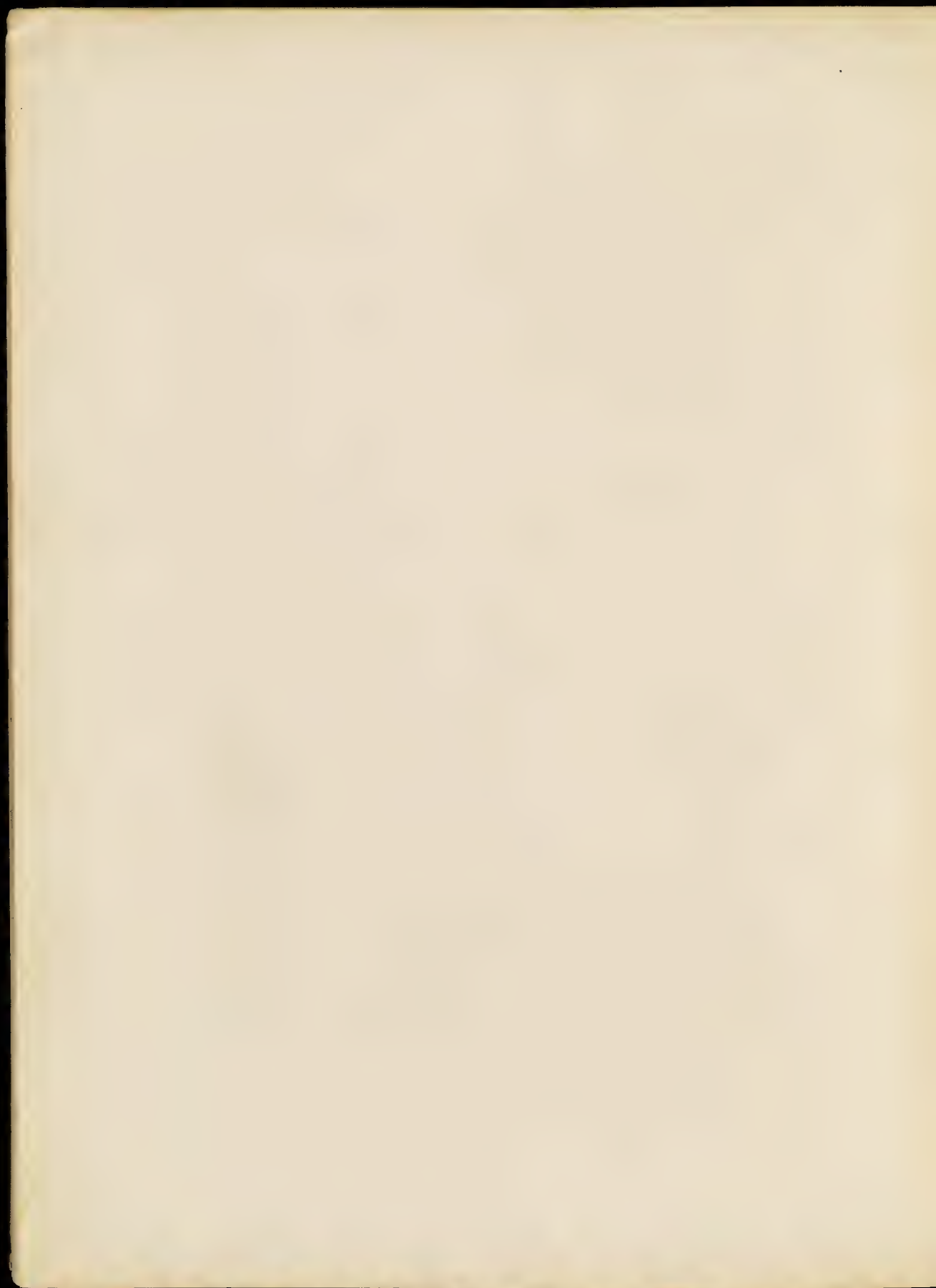




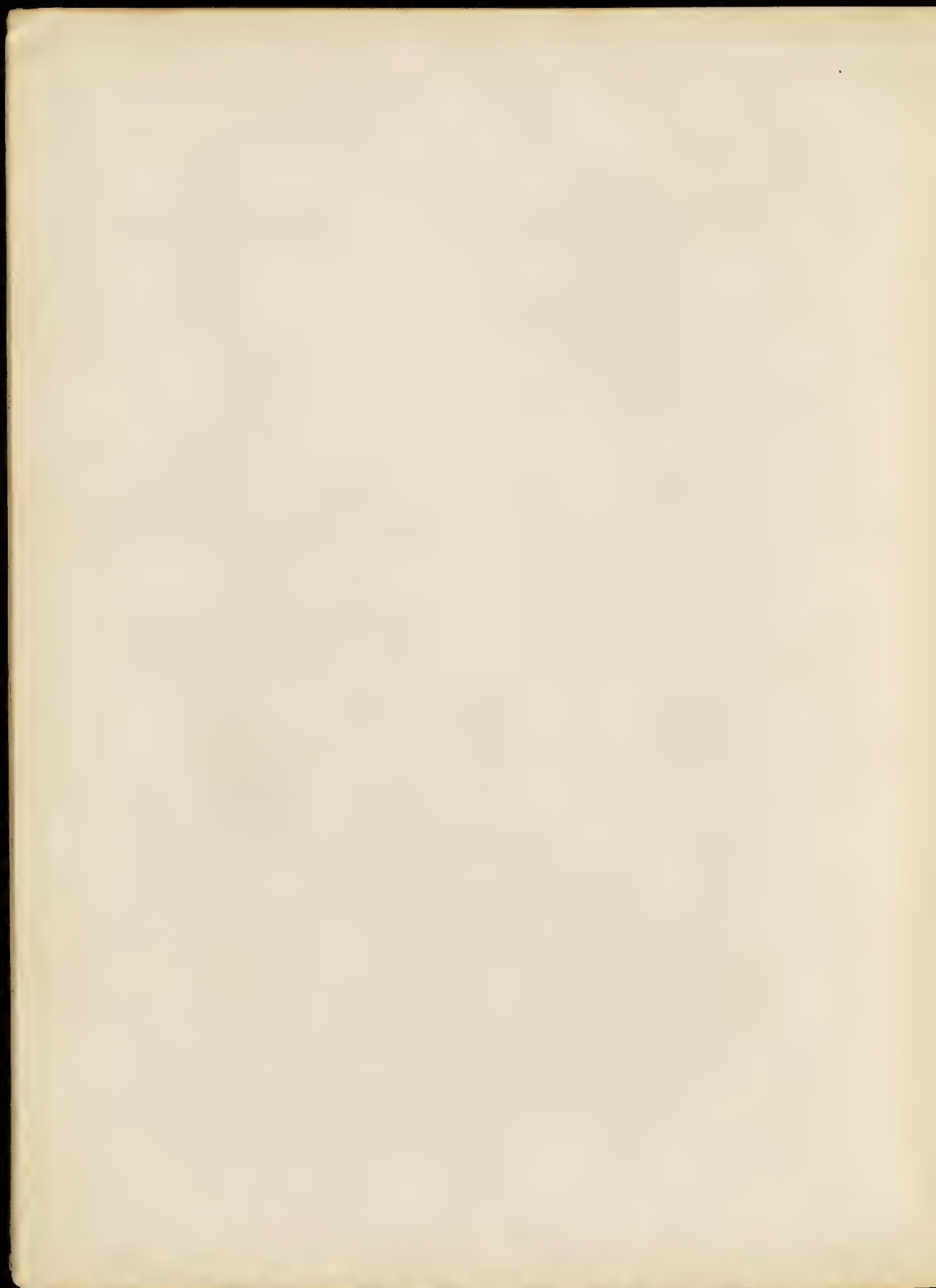


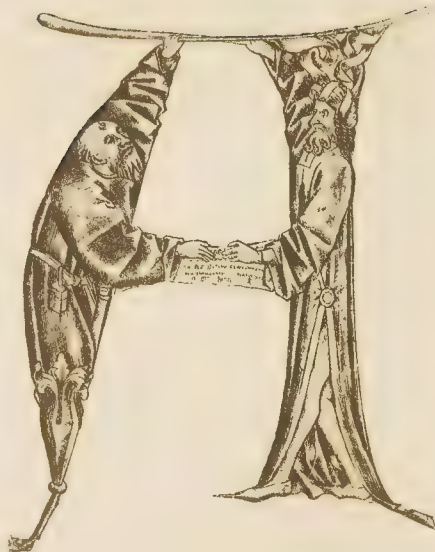












A.

1. From the woodcut alphabet at Basle. Schr. 1999.
2. From the alphabet engraved by the Master of the Book of Hours.
3. From the alphabet in pen-and-ink. Bagford collection.
4. From the woodcut alphabet. Bagford collection.





I. K.

1. From the woodcut alphabet at Basle. Schr. 1699.
2. From the alphabet engraved by the Master of the Banderoles.





E. F. R. S. T. V.

From the woodcut alphabet at Basle. Schr. 1999.



